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ABSTRACT

An address evaluating the environmental situation, presented by William D. Ruckelshaus, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, is contained in this document. Delivered for an Earth Day program at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, April 22, 1971, it stresses the point that environmental concern has changed from an era of awareness one year ago to one of action today. The focus is on the individual and the responsibility each bears to move beyond awareness to action to return man to a balance with nature. One must incorporate an assessment of the impact of all that he may plan or do on nature and its finite resources, as well as consider alternatives which might minimize environmental damage. The development of an environmental ethic which values the heritage of man on the earth is needed together with a commitment to back up this belief. While the elements exist for a successful solution to the problems of environmental degradation, man must unite to achieve such goals and offer Americans their best hope for dramatic success in restoration and preservation of the environment. (BL)

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FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

AN ADDRESS BY

WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS, ADMINISTRATOR

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY -- April 22, 1971

EARTH DAY

Last year some said there would never be another Earth Day. They saw concern for our environment as a fad, and claimed that the instant enthusiasm of an activist generation would soon flow elsewhere. I believe they were wrong.

But why this second Earth Day? Is this second day of commitment only a repetition of what we have said and attempted before?

I think not. I believe there are fundamental distinctions between our celebration of the earth a year ago and our commitment to its preservation now.

In terms of the environment, we are moving from an era of awareness to an era of action. Since the last Earth Day, the point has been driven home that the problem of the restoration and preservation of the environment is a problem which transcends generation gaps, partisan divisions, and national boundaries.

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A year ago Americans gathered in classrooms and lecture halls, on city streets and on grassy knolls, out of concern and out of anger to call for an accounting of man's stewardship of the planet and its resources. And in the Shadow of the Atomic Age we realized man can destroy himself piecemeal as well as by holocaust.

We came to realize the human dimensions of antiseptic statistics.

We came to realize that the more than 1400 pounds of air pollution per person which rides the wind and rain across this continent is a hazard to health and life and the human spirit.

We came to realize that more than 50 trillion gallons of hot water, millions of tons of organic and chemical pollutants, enormous amounts of fertilizers, pesticides, and most of all, sewage every year are spoiling rivers once celebrated in our art and literature and history. The Hudson and the Potomac, the Missouri and the Monongahela, the Snake and the Androscoggin -- all rivers rich in history -- are today rivers rich in industrial and municipal wastes.

We came to realize that the more than 7 million automobiles, 20 million tons of paper, 48 billion cans and 26 billion bottles a year which litter our landscape means that almost nowhere on this continent can man escape the impact he has had on nature.

We came to realize too that we were not alone in our disregard for the delicate balance of life.

It is said Lake Erie is dying, but Lake Baikal in Soviet Siberia, the oldest and deepest freshwater lake in the world, suffers discharges from pulpmills every day and is in her own race with time. The irreplaceable ancient statuary of Rome is being eaten every day by an acid smog more disastrous than all the armies of Gaul. The fabled Rhine, celebrated by Byron as the "valley of sweet waters," is now the waste removal system for the industries of the Ruhr. In Tokyo policemen have to be relieved to breathe pure oxygen from tanks while they are directing traffic. In Seoul, South Korea, Taipei, Formosa and Ankara, Turkey and the rest of the developing world which is urbanizing at a rate unprecedented in human history, little time is left before they too are overwhelmed by the backlash of progress.

None of that knowledge can give us comfort. The year of awareness is over. The time for action is now. No longer can we substitute slogans or symbols for solutions.

Throughout this week the press has remarked on the change of tone between the observance of Earth Day today and a year ago. There are no mass meetings and marches now.

No boisterous crowds, no buried automobiles. We have recognized the truth of Ortega y Gasset's observation: "I am myself and what is around me, and if I do not save it, it shall not save me."

The focus of Earth Day II is the individual -- the responsibility each of us bears to move beyond awareness to action that will return man to a balance with nature. Whether as citizen or consumer, producer or promoter, legislator or lawyer -- or as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency -- we all have a role to play, specific responsibilities to meet, if we truly wish to enjoy clean air, pure water, quiet skies and streets, uncluttered countryside and a less crowded planet.

Individuals and institutions alike must realize an untamed river is not simply a channel for barges, a source of hydropower, or a convenient sewer. Open land is something other than a potential subdivision. A forest is a heritage -- not just a stand of marketable timber. The wilderness is more than a source of renewal and a last resort, it is yesterday untrammeled by the technology of today.

More so than ever before, government is meeting its responsibility to enhance and protect the environment. Some say it is about time and I agree. But the time has come! It has come for us all.

Last February, President Nixon sent to Congress the most comprehensive plan for environmental reform and reconstruction that has ever been proposed.

He has called for a $12 billion three year program that will enable every community in America to provide at least secondary treatment of its sewage.

He has called for a graduated tax on sulfur oxides to encourage the elimination of one of the most harmful of air pollutants.

He has called as well for a special tax to make the price of unleaded gasoline lower than the leaded variety.

He has called for legislation which will insure that adequate tests are performed on any potentially toxic substance before it is introduced into the environment.

He has called for legislation to restrict the dumping of wastes in the ocean where they can endanger the rich diversity of life that thrives in the sea.

He has called for the adoption of a national land use policy to stop suburban sprawl, urban ugliness, and the kind of random development that wastes dwindling land resources.

These and other proposed measures will not only bridge the gaps in existing legislation, but will inaugurate a policy of preventive medicine with regard to environmental protection. This new commitment on behalf of government includes also a new agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, which has already shown its independence and determination to utilize all of the enforcement tools at its disposal against any who infringe the right of every American to clean air, pure water and unspoiled land.

But all of the resources of government and all of the legislation Congress may pass cannot equal the benefit that will come from enlightened citizens who realize that the earth is man's only home. No longer can we ride the coattails of nature without paying full fare for the ride.

In individual, as well as corporate and societal decisions, we must incorporate an assessment of the impact of all that we may plan or do on nature and its finite resources. We have hardly begun to realize in our personal lives the profound changes environmental enhancement may require.

The National Environmental Policy Act directs every agency of the federal government to assess and make public the environmental impact of each of its major actions, as well as to consider alternatives which might minimize environmental damage. Every individual and organization must accept the same self-discipline.

We must abandon the concept of a gross national product in favor of an environmental ethic that encourages us to see the net cost of the goods and services we consume. The flashy new car on the showroom floor must be seen for all that it is, and not just as an attractive convenience. It represents one more car on already crowded highways. A heap of junk to be disposed of -- someday, but also a conglomeration of valuable resources to be recycled one day. And it is a major source of air pollution. When all of us adopt that outlook we will have established an environmental ethic in this nation which will be our best insurance against abuse of our resources.

The time has come for all who value the heritage of man on this earth to back up their belief with a commitment. In our individual and corporate actions, we can make the difference between action now, or more months and years of idle talk and fearful speculation.

At this Earth Day II I believe all the elements exist for a successful solution to the problem of environmental degradation. The public in increasing numbers demonstrates awareness of the problem and support for its solution. A national administration of one party, and a Congress dominated by another, seem equally committed to providing the laws and resources to protect and enhance the environment. The technology exists to control all forms of visible pollution, and research is being conducted now to fill the gaps in our

knowledge. The battle is not over, nor will victory be easy or even total, but the climate is ripe for significant action.

As we move from awareness to action, we might remember our society badly needs some successes.

For over a generation, this nation has wrestled with problems which have yet to surrender to solution. Problems of race and urban decay, of health care and poverty, of economics and crime, of war and a wavering spirit.

Over and over again, we have promised solutions to these problems and we have disappointed and disillusioned ourselves when hollow lives and decaying cities could not be easily restored. The task now is to overcome the disappointments of the past as we build our common future.

I believe that the protection of the environment offers America its best hope for a dramatic success.

Achieving the goal of a clean and healthy environment must be done by us all -- by every American. We can reach that goal in this decade. And in reaching it we can trigger a chain reaction of confidence and hope that will help us to achieve all of our great goals for the seventies.

Behind the issue of environmental protection we can unite every American, with no man as an adversary and no man as an antagonist.

If every one of us will adopt the simple truth that "I can save the earth," we will realize how much we can achieve together.